

BULGARIA

«ALEXANDER NEVSKY» MEMORIAL CHURCH





Iconostasis of the Central Altar and the Thrones
The Holy Virgin, by Mrkvička

Iconostasis of the Northern Altar, by Mrkvička

Jesus Christ, by Vaznetsov



Prince Boris I, by Professor Mitov



Icon of the Holy Virgin in the Altar



Almighty God, by Myassoyedov





Almighty God, by Myassoyedov



Part of the Narthex

Excerpts from the Rules and Regulations governing the Internal Order in the Alexander Nevsky Memorial Church

Article 8. « ... visitors are forbidden to take photographs in the church, to make copies of icons and mural paintings, to make tape recordings of the performances of the choir, without the explicit permission of the Holy Synod and of the church trustees respectively, and in the latter's absence of the priest who is on duty ».

Article 9. « ... it is forbidden to take around groups of visitors and to give lectures on the paintings, etc. during church services, to talk in a loud voice and to make a noise; to enter the church wearing improper clothes and hats ».

The Memorial Church is open to visitors in the spring and summer season (May 1 to September 30) from 7,30 to 12 A. M. and from 4 to 7 P. M., and in the autumn and winter season (October 1 to April 30) from 7,30 to 12 A. M. and from 3,30 to 6 P. M.

The Bulgarian Patriarch's Cathedral, the Alexander Nevsky Memorial Church, with its impressive aspect and variety of architectural forms is one of the most attractive sights for tourists visiting Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria. This magnificent Memorial Church was built as an expression of the Bulgarian people's gratitude to the fraternal Russian people, who had suffered some 200.000 casualties in the war for Bulgaria's liberation from Ottoman domination. The church is consecrated to the great Russian general, the Prince of Vladimir and of Novgorod, Alexander Nevsky, a Russian national hero, who was canonized as a saint by the Russian Orthodox Church.

History, architectural style, size

The Memorial Church was built after a design by the well-known Russian architect, Professor Alexander Pomerantsev, between 1904 and 1912, in the architectural style of the Russian Northern Empire — a cruciform domed three-nave basilica with three altars. The length of the church is 71 m, and its width — 55 m. The belfry, which is 50,25 m high, has 12 bells, the largest of which weighs about 12 tons. Its tones can be heard from a distance of 30 km.

Interior

An impression of great splendour is created by the large amount of precious onyxes and alabasters, by the variously coloured marbles from Brazil, Morocco, Italy, the Aegean region, the Caucasus and Germany — the exquisite openwork ornamentation of the thrones, the altar walls, the synthronus of the central altar and almost the entire interior of the church.

Not less wonderful are the mosaics made after designs by the Bulgarian artist Professor Anton Mitov, containing a great variety of ornaments, among which the golden mosaics of the Venetian type on the inside vault of the dome, on the king's throne and its canopy and on the central altar stand out particularly.

Paintings

The beautiful icons and mural paintings, the work of Russian and Bulgarian artists, are of the greatest artistic value. Particularly valuable are the two icons painted by the Russian artist Victor Vaznetsov — of Jesus Christ and The Virgin Mary with the Infant, placed on the iconostasis of the central altar. The icons of Jesus Christ, The Holy Virgin and Sts. Cyril and Methodius, painted by the Czech artist Ivan Mrkvička, who lived and worked in Bulgaria, are also exquisite works of art. They are placed on the iconostasis of the northern altar, which is consecrated to the brothers Cyril and Methodius, the authors of the Bulgarian alphabet.

The walls of the church on the inside are all covered with mural paintings. The entire inside area of the central dome, which has a diameter of 16 m, is occupied by a mural painting representing Almighty God, on which the famous Russian artist Myassoyedov worked for nine months.

Of exceedingly great value are also the mural paintings of the Russian artist Bolotnov, representing «The Wedding at Cana-in-Galilee» and of Ivan Mrkvička, representing «Jesus Christ in the Temple with the Doctors and the Pharisees». The first is in the southern and the second in the northern nave.

Specialists and artists from six countries took part in the construction and decoration of the church and did their best to create this national treasure. It is no accident that the state sets aside substantial sums every year for the maintenance and preservation of the church.

A Museum of mediaeval and antique art

An exhibition of mediaeval and antique works of art, which is a branch of the National Art Gallery, is arranged in the crypt of the Memorial Church. Some of the most precious Bulgarian icons and mural paintings from the 12th to the 17th centuries are on show in it. A copy of the famous Proto-Bulgarian Gold Treasure (consisting of 23 pieces) found in Nagy Sankt Miklos (Hungary) is also exhibited here. Its original is kept in Vienna (14 pieces) and Budapest (9 pieces). A model (natural size) of the unique Thracian Tomb dating from the 4th century B. C., which is situated near the town of Kazanluk, in the Valley of Roses, is also displayed in the crypt.



The Memorial Church at Night

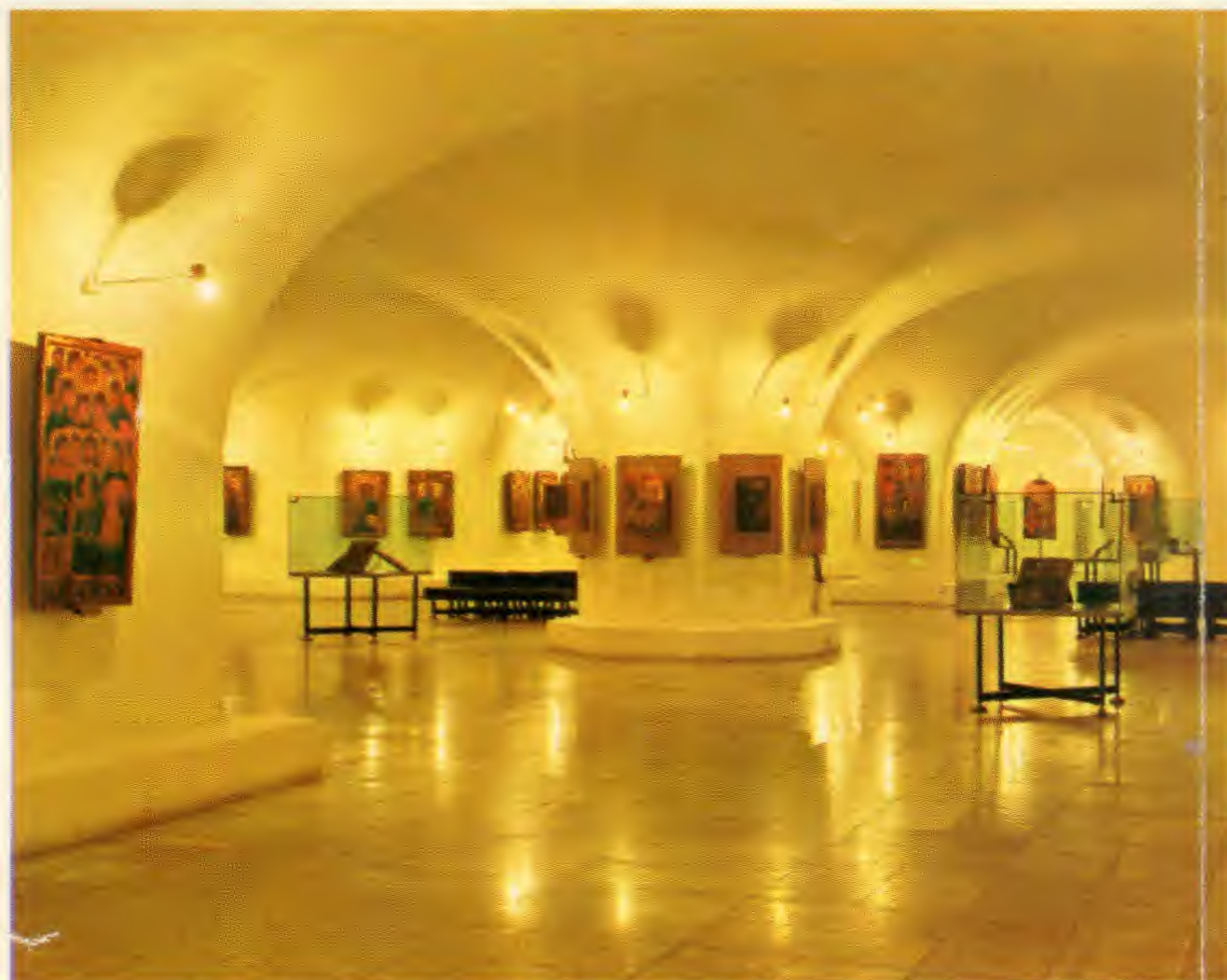
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The Wedding at Cana-In-Galilee by Bolotnov



The Branch of the National Gallery for Antique and Mediaeval Art



The Memorial Church at Night



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